

City of New Orleans
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Code Enforcement Holds Nearly 10,000 Hearings in 2009

The City of New Orleans Code Enforcement Department held 9,962 hearings in 2009. This resulted in thousands of properties throughout New Orleans becoming compliant with the City Code.

On November 19, 2009, the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center reported that during the previous year, the number of blighted properties in the City had been reduced by 9,000 (See: gnocdc.org/benchmarksforblight/index.html). Code Enforcement plans to hold a large number of hearings in 2010.



Large Hearing Event Held in March

Following agreement on the City's 2010 budget, the City resumed its administrative hearing process. Code Enforcement held hearings for 450 blighted properties at the St. Maria Goretti Church in New Orleans East from March 15-18. Goretti Church has been very supportive in providing space for these large hearing events. In 2009 the department held four large hearing events like this one, which instigated repairs to hundreds of properties.

Demolition of Major Apartment Complexes

Prosecuting abandoned apartment complexes is a priority for Code Enforcement. The Department has brought a number of apartment complexes through the hearing process and, in some cases, filed suit against the owners in Civil District Court. As a result, owners demolished a number of complexes in 2009. This saved the City nine million dollars in demolition costs.

Michoud Apartments (behind Six Flags): More than 400 units
Devonwood Apartments (in Algiers): More than 400 units
La Province Apartments (along I10): More than 300 units
Ber Mas Apartments (off of Read Blvd.): More than 200 units



The Strategic Demolitions for Economic Recovery Program

This program targets severely blighted properties along New Orleans' 51 largest corridors, including I-10, Claiborne Ave., Chef Menteur Hwy. and Tulane Ave., and the City's nine Housing Opportunity Zones. You can view a map of the Housing Opportunity Zones by going to Cityofno.com, selecting the "Departments and Agencies" dropdown, choosing Code Enforcement and clicking on "Code Enforcement Publications."

The property owners are provided with extensive notification prior to the demolition, significantly more than is required by the City Code. All properties also must be approved for demolition by the State Historic Preservation Office. Properties in historic districts must be approved by the Historic District Landmark Committee or the Neighborhood Conservation District Committee.

Increased Notification Standards

Proper notification is central to Code Enforcement's mission. That's why the Department exceeds the City Code's noticing requirements and now uses seven sources to identify property owner's addresses:

1. Assessor's Records (Required by City Code)
2. Conveyance Records (Not required by City Code)

3. Mortgage Records (Not required by City Code)
4. Westlaw People Search Software (Not required by City Code)
5. Louisiana Secretary of State's Web site (Not required by City Code)
6. United State's Postal Service's Web site (Not required by City Code)
7. City of New Orleans Finance Department records (Not required by City Code)
8. Staff also calls the phone number listed at whitepages.com (Not required by City Code)

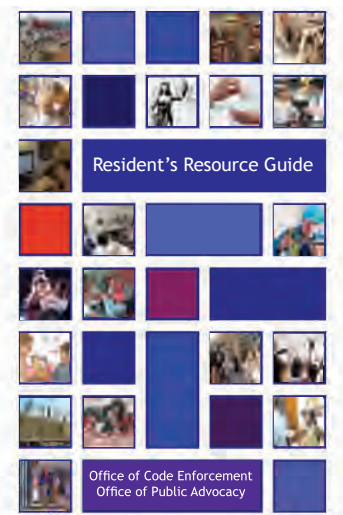
Although this notification process is time consuming and may reduce the overall number of hearings the Department can hold, it gives property owners more opportunities to avoid fines and leads to a higher ratio of abatements, which is the City's ultimate goal.

Improvements to the Department's Web Site

Code Enforcement has expanded its Web site, adding information about hearing results, demolitions, the enforcement process and ways to protect yourself from contractor fraud. Residents can access the Web site by going to www.cityofno.com clicking on the "Department and Agencies" drop-down and selecting "Code Enforcement." Additional recovery information can be found at www.rebuildrecoveroneneworleans.com

Code Enforcement's Resource Guide

Code Enforcement and the City of New Orleans Office of Public Advocacy have created an extensive resource guide to assist property owners who cannot afford to make repairs. The guide lists over 350 non profit and government resources. Citizens can access the guide through Code Enforcement's Web site or receive a hard copy from Code Enforcement's office located at 1340 Poydras St., Suite 1100.



Contact Andrew Holbein at aholbein@cityofno.com to have your organization added to this guide



Partnership with neighborhood groups

Neighborhood groups have played a large role in blight removal and Code Enforcement is looking to expand their role. On September 12, 2009 Code Enforcement held its first Residents' Training Day to teach residents about the enforcement process and how to establish a blight committee. Eighty nine neighborhood associations attended. Groups were asked to submit a list of the ten worst properties in their area. The Department inspected and prosecuted

prosecuted those in violation. Code Enforcement has also partnered with neighborhood associations in Gentilly, the Upper Ninth Ward, the Bywater, the Seventh Ward and the Marigny. Inspectors and code officials have walked the area with residents, identifying code violations and discussing recovery issues. This has led to cases against hundreds of properties.

Neighborhood groups are a crucial partner in fighting blight and Code Enforcement hopes to expand this partnership in 2010.

How Residents Can Assist with the Code Enforcement Process

Some neighborhood associations play an active role in blight reduction. Their efforts have generated best practices that other associations can adopt:

- Gather information on reliable contractors and realtors within your area. Many owners, especially the elderly, want to make repairs but don't know where to begin or are wary of fraud. While the City cannot recommend individual businesses, neighborhood groups are good sources for this information.
- Attend Code Enforcement hearings. All hearings are open to the public and neighbors are welcome to observe or request an opportunity to testify. After the hearings many owners become interested in making repairs and the information about contractors can get them started.
- Contact owners before they are cited. Some neighborhood associations get 30% of their residents to bring property into compliance just by contacting them. These groups explain how the property is affecting quality of life and warn neighbors of the possibility of \$100 to \$500 in daily fines if they are prosecuted.

A Letter from Tom Schnatz, President of the Lakeview Civic Association's Blight Committee

The number of blighted and overgrown properties in Lakeview continues to decline. The Blight Committee attributes much of the progress to the hard work and dedication of its residents. However, we also recognize that the City has made very significant contributions to the cleanup through its blight code enforcement inspection and hearing processes.

Many Lakeview properties have been inspected and owners have been summoned to administrative hearings. The LCIA Blight Committee works with the City to help focus inspections on our most offensive properties.

Blight Committee representatives attend most of these hearings to make statements and offer recent photos attesting to the current condition of the property. City blight hearings are very important and effective because they often result in property owners cleaning up their properties in order to avoid fines. Many of these hearings result in significant fines and court costs to the owner.

The Lakeview Civic Association's Blight Committee has other ongoing efforts to encourage owners of blighted properties to cleanup. We periodically survey all Lakeview properties and have sent letters to blighted property owners advising them of the code requirements asking them to comply. Sometimes we've called the owners to request immediate property remediation. We always point out the risk they face if the property gets caught up in an enforcement action.

The LCIA thanks Code Enforcement for their hard work and we support all their efforts to fight blight throughout the city.



Campaign to Address Abandoned Swimming Pools

Abandoned swimming problems present significant health and safety risks, especially to children. Code Enforcement has been working with residents and the Mosquito Control Board to identify and prosecute owners of abandoned swimming pool. The Department has prosecuted 322 pool owners. In most cases the pool was brought into compliance by the owner. The City will be draining and filling pools that remain in violation. Owners will be responsible for the cost

Residents can go to Code Enforcement's Web site <http://www.cityofno.com/pg-147-1-code-enforcement.aspx> to view a list of the prosecuted pools. If you suspect a pool of being in violation, submit the address to Andrew Holbein at aholbein@cityofno.com. Please mark the subject line "Abandoned Pool: [insert address]"

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The Interim Nuisance Abatement Program

The City of New Orleans Environmental Health Department is implementing a \$3 million program to remove health hazards from communities. This program will allow the City to fill abandoned pools, cut grass and remove trash and debris from lots. It is funded by federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds granted to the City for Hurricane Katrina/Rita recovery.

Residents found to be in violation will be fined court costs as well as the costs for filling the pool or cutting the grass.



Meet Keith Ferrouillet, Interim Nuisance Abatement Program Manager

Keith was raised in the Gentilly neighborhood. After graduating from St. Augustine High School, he attended Howard University in Washington DC before returning to New Orleans to receive a Masters Degree from Tulane's School of Public Health.

Keith worked for Volunteers of America for two years before being hired to manage the Interim Nuisance Abatement Program. He supervises staff assigned to the program, oversees the notification process and ensures that all state and federal requirements are met.